BCES Conference Books, 2022, Volume 20. Sofia: Bulgarian Comparative Education Society
ISSN 2534-8426 (online), ISBN 978-619-7326-12-3 (online)

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International Perspective on Managing Racial Integration in Secondary Schools

Abstract

The notion that educators are committed to effective facilitation of racial integration in secondary schools has become the keystone in developing a socially just schooling system in South Africa. This paper sets out to determine the role educators play in the transformation of schools towards racial integration, as well as their nature and perception in facilitating racial integration in the truest sense. Findings emanating from this research indicate that the striking down of the policies and educational system of the Apartheid regime has propelled educators from segregated backgrounds into teaching learners from different racially diverse backgrounds. Similarly, most learners for the first time are being taught by racially diverse educators. A qualitative framework is used to investigate firsthand experiences of managing racial integration in relation to educators and school management, and their role in determining successful racial integration in secondary schools in South Africa. The purpose of this paper is to prepare educators with the accumulative knowledge, understanding and tenets of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) on how to create opportunities for decolonising classroom content and practice as well as addressing the weaknesses in previous approaches to racially integrate learners in desegregated schools.

Keywords: racial integration, management, secondary schools

Introduction

The South African system of apartheid seriously affected the nature of educational provision. Apartheid education reflected a segregated and enforced social inequities, schooling was used as a tool to distort the values and identities of learners. Every aspect of schooling was regulated to race; educational budget provisions, the structure of education bureaucracies, the composition of staff and learners in schools, the kind of curriculum followed, and the ethos prevalent in schools (Seekings, 2008). The foundation of apartheid was the system of race separation enshrined in law by the 1950 Population Registration Act (Seekings, 2008). The Act provided for all South Africans to be classified into one of four basic racial categories: Whites, Africans (Blacks), Coloureds and Indians. The Bantu Education Act, Act No 47 of 1953 created a separate educational system for African students under the management of the Department of Bantu Education which compiled a curriculum that suited the nature and requirement of black people.

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 catalysed the Bill of Rights and the South African Constitution, formalised the desegregation of schools in South Africa, and created the opportunity for students from diverse cultural backgrounds to attend schools of their choice (Vandeyar, 2008). In view of the apparent dearth of information on the life of desegregated schools, research was undertaken to explore

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the experiences of school management and governance structures in managing racial integration in public secondary schools.

Background

Since the advent of the democratic order in South Africa numerous structural and systemic changes were brought about by the Constitution (1996) which provides a 'rationale for the geographical redefinition' to desegregate South Africa into a racially inclusive nation (Carrim, 1998). In addition, the Constitution makes provision for fundamental human rights which is catalysed by the Bill of Rights (Act No 108, 1996) where everyone has the right to basic education and to further their education which the State must make available and accessible (Vandeyar, 2008).

The South African Schools Act (SASA No 84 of 1996) formalised the desegregation of schools which redressed the legacy of the apartheid policies. As a direct response racial integration was driven as part of the education reform to accommodate the diverse nature of society. This gave rise to the following problems: Firstly, learners experienced great difficulty coping with the academic, social and emotional challenges given that learners came from historically disadvantaged backgrounds (Meier, 2005). Secondly, efforts were made to capacitate school leadership and management; however, there remains a significant problem in school governance structures to cope with the challenges and the overwhelming tasks to successfully integrate racially diverse learners and educators. Lastly, a plethora of policies and legislation were developed to augment significant reform in its education system. However, the problem with implementation persists which, undermines the realisation of an impressive policy architecture required to make a profound difference to teaching and learning in public secondary schools.

According to Vandeyar (2003, p. 193) diversity refers to the educator, learner and society that are inextricably linked to societal values, cultures and practices. Given the complexities of the systemic and structural problems, racial integration to a significant degree reflects the larger political and social problems in South African society. The literature reinforces and expands on the issues in this regard that both the macro (national) and micro (school) elements of transforming schools from assimilation to multiculturalism did not completely and holistically lead to successful racial integration.

Consequently, this led to continued marginalization and retention of exclusionary approaches in an attempt to maintain 'standards' (Carrim, 1998). The failure to translate the macro initiatives to impact and address racism and other forms of discrimination will continuously undermine the intention to totally transform the schooling system and design if it does not relate to actual realities on the ground of how racism is "perceived, understood, experienced and reconstructed" (Carrim, 1998, p. 11).

The dominant approaches of assimilation, colour-blindness; the contributionist, and multicultural education underpin the debates of managing racial integration in secondary schools. These approaches explain and illustrate how complex interrelatedness of socio-economic, historical and cultural values influence school life of learners and educators. Meier and Hartell (2009) have stipulated that these approaches are limited and insufficient in dealing with 'mixed race' groups. One is aware that the current thinking around racial integration has not been adequately

managed in secondary schools in South Africa. Hence, the specific focus of this paper is on racism and racial integration in public secondary schools.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines the "complex relationships between and among race, racism and jurisprudence" (Vandeyar, 2008). CRT seeks to understand how mono racial schools create and maintain the dominant culture as supreme over diverse learners. Their focus is on changing the bonds between law and racial power. By incorporating focus group discussions and individual interviews in this study, CRT uses multiple interpretative methodologies to analyse the narratives of those who have been victimized by the legal system so that I can understand "socially ingrained" and "systemic" forces at work in their oppression (Pizarro, 1999).

CRT was explored as a valuable approach for thinking through different ways of managing racial integration in South African secondary schools. For this to happen, CRT is used as a theoretical lens through which the study can be interpreted, the power imbalances of learners and educators can be revealed, the possible ideologies that are culturally and historically prescribing racial inequity can be further investigated (Maree, 2007).

General orientation to the problem

The harsh reality that is illuminated by the literature which draws on the notion that the problems of managing racial integration in schools are multiple; especially for those schools whose population have been derived from one race (Chisholm, 2004). Unless reflections on the management of racial integration receive urgent attention, the situation can potentially become volatile. Furthermore, school management need to be re-engineered into purposeful vehicles of change that will facilitate the development and the mind set of educators and managers in racially diverse schools. Our belief is that emphasis on the above critical issues must be taken into consideration otherwise there may be many possible disastrous consequences not only to schools but to national reconciliation.

Literature review

International views on racial integration as well as some perspectives of the history of the South African education system in the apartheid era are explored. A detailed account of literature concerning the approaches of racial integration is given, with an overview of critiques of approaches used in the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada and South Africa in order to show that they are not the solution to effective racial integration in racially diverse classrooms. The central issue of racial integration in public secondary schools and the history of race in the context of education in South Africa are discussed. As well as the theoretical framework informing the management of racial integration in secondary schools, notably critical race theory (CRT).

International perspective

Racial integration in schools has been a problem internationally as well as in South Africa. The three countries cited above were chosen because they have been

characterised as nations of racial diversity, clearly traceable to the period after World War II. The diversity has been and continues to be enriched by indigenous Africans (Blacks) and a large number of immigrants and refugees from countries around the world. The influx of immigrants led these countries to develop innovative practices toward racial integration.

The United Kingdom

The process of a racially integrated schooling system was introduced in the UK in response to Black immigration after World War II. During the 1960s, assimilation was the first approach adopted in an effort to assimilate or incorporate Blacks who were not British, which eventually translated to race (Black and White). It was based on the belief that for Blacks to be integrated into society, an education policy was required that de-emphasized the minority groups' racial and cultural differences and stressed a British identity. Assimilation was aimed at integrating 'alien' Blacks into the ways, language, lifestyles and values of British people, therefore denying their ethnic origins and identities. Furthermore, it was hoped that mixing the diverse groups on the basis of racial tolerance would lead to an integrated nation (Carrim, 1995). After the failure of assimilation, a multicultural education approach was adopted during the late 1960s and early 1970s to combat racism. Although multicultural education was suggested as a solution, but this did not address or prevent the issues of institutional racism because the main goal was to render Black learners "politically, socially and culturally compliant" (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993).

The United States of America

Racial integration in US schools began after the 1966 race riots which shocked the American nation, as the government attempted to address racial problems and promote racial integration by introducing the assimilation approach. Assimilationists' primary goal in education was to 'Americanize (Anglicize)' the multiracial immigrants (American Indians, African Americans and Mexican Americans) and help them to acquire the language, values and behaviour needed to succeed in American English culture and its institutions. The assimilation approach was unchallenged during this period, since it was understood by minority group leaders and the majority of group leaders as the proper societal goal. However, it promoted social injustice which stripped Black learners' identity, culture, language and traditions. The failure to effectively integrate Black learners led to an alternative approach, namely multicultural education. Banks (1984) proposed three dimensions to achieve this "holistic multicultural education in a pluralist democracy", namely maintenance of a dynamic diversity, acceptance of the need for social cohesion, and a commitment to greater equity from the principal and educators (Lynch, 1989, p. 24).

Canada

Unlike the UK and the USA, which focused on assimilation, the Canadian government focused on addressing the issues of racism and racial segregation. In 1963, a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism investigated the relationships between English and French regarded multicultural education as a status quo and produced social and economic inequities that illuminated the

difference between the different racial groups based on status. Antiracist education did not effectively integrate the diverse racial groups and had no interest in dealing with the concerns of the minority groups.

The weaknesses of the different racial integration approaches in the UK, USA and Canada

The weaknesses of the various racial integration approaches as they unravel in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada will be discussed in this section. It is important to note that although these racial integration approaches started after World War II, however none of the approaches began simultaneously in any of these countries. The development in one country may have been the result of that in another country.

Weakness of the assimilation approach

The assimilation approach to racially integrate minority groups or Black African learners was absorbed in the ethos of the school and the majority racial group. This meant that they had to adopt the language, culture and value of the school while foregoing their languages, culture and values. According to Carrim (1995) the assimilation approach led to the inclusion of Black learners into the way of life of the majority group but did not make any effort to engage with the minority group.

Weakness of the multicultural approach

Multicultural education did not address the issues on institutional racism (Banks, 1984), and lacked the necessary strategies to enhance critical engagement among racially diverse groups. Gallagher (2004, p. 91) states that multicultural education did not "prevent racism but rather promoted it", some of the aims being to make Black learners politically, economically, socially and culturally compliant. It failed to address the principles of social justice and human value.

Weakness of antiracist education

The failure of antiracist education lies in its inability to cultivate critical thinking skills and openly discuss challenges of racially diverse learners that can enable them to connect and belong to an education system in which social justice and effective integration is practiced. According to Naidoo (1996, p. 38) the weakness of antiracist education is its incapacity to display an "awareness of nuances, contradictions, inconsistencies and ambivalences".

The education system in apartheid South Africa

The problem of racial integration is more profound in South Africa because of apartheid education, which impacted on the collective and individual psyches of all South Africans, Black, White and others (Nkomo, McKinney & Chisholm, 2004). The historical development of education for the integration of racially diverse public secondary school communities in South Africa can only be effectively evaluated against the backdrop of the educational history of the country. Although desegregation only began in 1993, there were only 60,000 Black students at Model

C schools, a way of keeping schools White, and about 40,000 'African' and 'Coloured' learners at 'Indian' schools. By the end of 1995, African learners at Coloured, White and Indian schools did not exceed 15% (or approximately 200,000) of the total learner enrolment (Vally & Dalamba, 1999). In October 1990 desegregation took place to a limited extent in White state schools following educational change. According to Vally and Dalamba (1999, p. 10), this meant that Black African learners could be admitted into White state schools on condition that they all maintained a 51% White majority in their population; secondly, the White cultural ethos of the school had to remain intact; thirdly, the management council of the schools did not necessarily promote the employment of Black teachers on the staff of the schools; lastly, the financing of Black learners at these schools was the responsibility of the parent/s.

Findings

The years of turmoil have taken a heavy toll on the infrastructure of our education and training system. The South African Schools Act (SASA) No 84 of 1996 is the primary Act that regulates schools, its focal point being to revoke all apartheid past laws pertaining to schools, abolishing corporal punishment and admission tests, and providing compulsory education and a cohesive schooling system. Democracy has led to changes in the education system. In May 1994 a new Department of Education was established by proclamation, amalgamating all 18 departments of education, based on race, into one national and nine provincial departments. The opening of White (former House of Assembly) schools to Black learners was a major issue at the beginning of the year 1995.

The South African Human Rights Commission (2002, p. 4) stipulates that for racial integration to take place in schools racism needs to be acknowledged as a structural facet of society and be understood in its historical context. Many schools in the township remain mono-racial because of the apartheid system. However, over 20 years later the era of social harmony, development and prosperity still seems far-fetched. Media frequently reports that schools are characterized by tension, ignorance, misunderstanding and aggression as a result of the mismanagement of diversity (Meier, 2005).

Many educators lack the training and understanding on what the meaning of values in education is and how to translate the curriculum to promote racial integration in diverse classrooms. Educators need to be empowered to monitor the experiences and classroom practices of racially diverse learners and how they react to the values that are consistent with the curriculum. Educators should be compelled to participate on regular courses on racial integration in diverse classrooms in the hope that these programmes will empower school management and governance structures to value, teach and interact with racially diverse learners.

An ethos needs to be established to advocate a culture of non-racialism where all facets of the rights of children as described in the Constitution are practiced. A school environment of mutual accountability is fulfilled through a sense of commitment towards the realisation of a shared vision. Effective racial integration requires a collegial relationship between different government departments, school management and governance structures as well as educators that are able to manage the initiatives of the school against racism and racial discrimination.

The need for strong leadership and management to facilitate racial integration

In the policy framework of South African, management of racial integration in schools is embedded in the SASA (No 84 of 1996). The educational policy requires school managers, and educators to work in democratic and participative ways to build relationships among racially diverse learners and ensure effective delivery of education. Despite the end of apartheid in South Africa, the shadow of its ideology continues, no longer through racially explicit policies but by proxy, notably high school fees, exclusionary language and admission policies (Vally & Dalamba, 1999).

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) supports the social justice framework and distinguishes racism as an ingrained facet in schools. Comparatively, in the UK, USA and Canada, as well as South Africa, racism is part of the daily landscape and forms part of the "normal and natural", implying that there are inequitable conditions that occur systematically at policy level as well as overt acts of racism in schools (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). CRT focuses on transforming the curriculum that underpin school management use the tenets of CRT to construct active, dialogic, and dialectical lessons based on the content of the curriculum.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted approaches that are practiced by many educators, these contrived approaches, such as assimilation, colour-blindness, contributionist, and multicultural education are limited and insufficient in actually dealing with racially diverse groups. Many educators lack the training and understanding how to translate the curriculum to promote racial integration in diverse classrooms. The failure to translate the macro initiatives to impact and address racism and other forms of discrimination will continuously undermine the intention to totally transform the schooling system and design if it does not relate to actual realities. Therefore, effective racial integration requires a collegial relationship between different government departments, school management, governance structures including educators that are able to manage the initiatives of the school against racism and racial discrimination.

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